

Message Text

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TAGS:PINT, IN
SUBJECT: JANATA PARTY BOLSTERED BY BY-ELECTION VICTORIES

REF: NEW DELHI A-226

1. THE JANATA PARTY RECEIVED AN IMPORTANT BOOST WHEN
ITS CANDIDATES WON MOST OF THE BY-ELECTIONS HELD AROUND
INDIA IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. AS REPORTED IN REFAIR,
JANATA CANDIDATES (CINCLUDING CHIEF MINISTER SHEKHAWAT)
HAD WON TWO STATE ASSEMBLY CONTESTS IN RAJASTHAN IN
LATE NOVEMBER. THE JANATA CHIEF MINISTERS OF BIHAR
AND U.P. ALSO SCORED RESOUNDING VICTORIES ON DECEMBER
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18 TO WIN SEATS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE STATE ASSEMBLIES
BY MARGINS FAR LARGER THAN MOST OBSERVERS HAD
ANTICIPATED. ASIDE FROM THESE PRESTIGE RACES,
TWO OTHER ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTIONS WERE HELD IN BOTH
BIHAR AND U.P. JANATA CAPTURED ONE SEAT IN BIHAR,
WITH THE OTHER BEING WON BY A MARXIST CANDIDATE. IN
U.P., JANATA WON ONE SEAT AND CONGRESS CAPTURED THE

OTHER. ELSEWHERE, JANATA CHIEF MINISTER SHAIZA SCORED A VICTORY IN MANIPUR AND THE JANATA CANDIDATE DEFEATED HIS CONGRESS OPPONENT IN A STATE ASSEMBLY CONTEST IN PUNJAB. THE JANATA CANDIDATE IN THE GUJARAT ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTION, HOWEVER, LOST TO THE CONGRESS CANDIDATE.

2. IN BY-ELECTIONS TO THE LOK SHBHA, JANATA NOMINEE CHIMAN SHUKLA EASILY DEFEATED HIS CONGRESS OPPONENT TO WIN THE RAJKOT SEAT IN GUJARAT. THE MARGIN OF VICTORY IMPROVED DRAMATICALLY FROM THE 15,000 VOTES RECORDED IN MARCH TO OVER 49,000 THIS TIME. SHUKLA WAS AIDED BY A VIGOROUS AND UNITED CAMPAIGN EFFORT FEATURING SUCH SENIOR JANATA LEADERS AS FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE AND GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER BABUBBHAI PATEL. IN CONTRAST, THE CONGRESS EFFORT WAS WEAKENED BY FACTIONAL INFIGHTING. IN A BY-ELECTION TO THE FARIDKOT LOK SABHA SEAT IN PUNJAB, THE AKALI DAL CANDIDATE NOT SURPRISINGLY TROUNCED HIS CONGRESS OPPONENT. (AS PART OF ITS ELECTORAL UNDERSTANDING WITH THE AKALIS, JANATA DID NOT FIELD A CANDIDATE IN THIS AKALI DAL STRONGHOLD).

3. DESPITE THE IMPRESSIVE VICTORIES WON BY THE JANATA CHIEF MINISTERS IN BIHAR, RAJASTHAN AND U.P. AS WELL AS THE VICTORIES SCORED BY JANATA LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CANDIDATES ELSEWHERE, ATTENTION NATURALLY FOCUSED IN THOSE ASSEMBLY CONTESTS IN WHICH THE JANATA LOST. IN PARTICULAR, THE CONGRESS WIN IN THE PRESTIGIOUS LUCKNOW EAST CONSTITUENCY IN U.P. WAS SEEN AS A SETBACK FOR THE JANATA STATE GOVERNMENT. JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY MADHU LIMAYE, IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE POL COUNSELOR, SAID THE JANATA LOSS IN LUCKNOW WAS DUE TO URBAN VOTER DISSAISFACTION WITH JANATA'S PERFORMANCE AND THE PARTY'S LOSS OF SUPPORT IN THE IMPORTANT MUSLIM COMMUNITY STEMMING FROM THE U.P. GOVERNMENT'S MUCH CRITICIZED HANDLING OF MUSLIM SECTARIAN DISTURBANCES. HE DESCRIBED CHIEF MINISTER YADAV'S VICTORY AS AN INDICATION THAT THE JANATA RETAINS STRONG SUPPORT IN RURAL AREAS. JANATA'S LOSS OF ONE OF THE THREE BY-ELECTIONS IN BIHAR WAS PERHAPS INEVITABLE SINCE THE CONSTITUENCY (NIRSA) IS IN THE HEART OF THE SO-CALLED "RED-BELT" HEAVY INDUSTRY AREA ALONG THE WEST BENGAL BORDER. IT HAS BEEN TRADITIONALLY A COMMUNIST SEAT, AND THE BIHAR JANATA PARTY HAD NO HOPE OF WINNING IT. THE CONGRESS VICTORY OVER THE JANATA CANDIDATE IN THE GUJARAT ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTION WAS PROBABLY DUE TO

THE JANATA ORGANIZATION HAVING IGNORED THIS CONTEST
IN FAVOR OF THE MORE IMPORTANT RAJKOT PARLIAMENTARY
RACE.

4. DESPITE THE SETBACKS IN THESE SCATTERED CON-
STITUENCIES, THE JANATA OVERALL FARED WELL IN THIS
ROUND OF BY-ELECTIONS. MADHU LIMAYE, WHO IS OFTEN
CRITICAL OF HIS PARTY'S PERFORMANCE, REMARKED TO
THE POL COUNSELOR THAT HE WAS "SATISFIED" WITH THE
RESULTS, AND OBSERVERS HERE SEE THE OUTCOME AS AN
INDICATION THAT VOTERS ARE STILL SYMPATHETIC TO THE
JANATA GOVERNMENTS IN THE CENTER AND IN THE STATES
AND ARE WILLING TO GIVE THEM MORE TIME TO DEMONSTRATE
THEIR PERFORMANCE. AS WE NOTED IN REFAIR, SOME COM-
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MENTATORS PREDICTABLY REGARDED THE ELECTION RESULTS
AS A BAROMETER OF THE RULING PARTY'S STANDING. THE
"HINDUSTAN TIMES", FOR EXAMPLE, EDITORIALIZED THAT
THE ELECTIONS SHOW THAT "THE JANATA WAVE CONTINUES".
EDITORIALS IN OTHER PAPERS WERE MORE CAUTIOUS,
HOWEVER, DESCRIBING THE OUTCOME AS A "MORALE BOOSTER"
FOR THE JANATA WHICH WILL GIVE IT A RESPITE FROM
ITS CHRONIC FACTIONALISM -- IF ONLY FOR THE
MOMENT.

5. WE SHARE THIS ASSESSMENT. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE
MASSIVE MARGINS OF VICTORY SCORED BY THE JANATA
CHIEF MINISTERS OF BIHAR AND UP WILL DEFINITELY
STRENGTHEN THEIR HANDS IN DEALING WITH DISGRUNTLED
ELEMENTS IN THEIR OWN GOVERNMENTS. IT REMAINS TO BE
SEEN, HOWEVER, WHETHER THESE VICTORIES WILL ENABLE
THEM TO INJECT MORE PURPOSEFULNESS INTO THEIR LACK-
LUSTER MINISTRIES.
GOHEEN

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